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TRANSCARPATHIAN TERTIARY TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TO REMOTE TEACHING

This study examines tertiary teachers' attitudes towards distance education at two leading higher educational institutions in Transcarpathia, focusing on the shift prompted by the rise of online learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to identify commonalities and differences in perceptions among teachers, and exploring factors that shape these attitudes. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study systematically analyses teachers' demographic data, experiences, and perceptions, offering a comprehensive understanding of how they engage with and adapt to online education.

The research involved a diverse group of teachers of various disciplines, who participated in an online survey conducted during the 2023/2024 academic year. The survey was designed bilingually in Hungarian and Ukrainian to ensure inclusivity and effective communication. Quantitative analysis identified patterns and correlations, while qualitative analysis provided deeper insights into the nuanced experiences and challenges faced by teachers during online education.

Findings reveal that while most teachers felt prepared for online teaching, concerns about academic integrity, mental health, and digital assessment were prevalent. Despite these challenges, teachers acknowledged the flexibility and accessibility of online education but expressed a preference for traditional teaching methods. A notable trend observed was that younger teachers were more receptive to online education compared to their older counterparts, who were more apprehensive about the transition.

The study concludes that while distance learning offers significant benefits (e.g. flexibility, accessibility, a variety of digital tools, etc.), it also presents challenges (e.g. technical problems, lack of social interaction, workload and burnout, etc.) that must be addressed to enhance its effectiveness. The findings of this study can help shape educational policies and strategies to create more effective and inclusive learning environments in the changing world of education.

Key words: *challenges, distance learning, mental health, motivating students, online education, pandemic, student engagement, teacher attitudes, teacher support, Transcarpathia.*

Introduction and the current state of the research problem. In recent years, education has been dramatically transformed by the rise of distance learning, a shift that has redefined the traditional classroom and prompted a re-evaluation of how students and tertiary teachers perceive this mode of education. As technology increasingly bridges geographic gaps and expands access to resources, understanding the attitudes of these key stakeholders is crucial. This exploration is particularly relevant now, as education systems must adapt to these changes by examining the factors shaping perceptions and the future implications for teaching and learning. Research in this area highlights diverse perspectives, especially in light of challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and underscores the importance of understanding the evolving relationship between technology and education.

Hargis (2020) highlights a consensus among researchers that effective online education must prioritize pedagogical principles. However, he stresses the need for educa-tors to also understand technological intricacies to ensure equitable learning opportunities. This perspective aligns with Weller's (2020) meta-study, which traces the historical integration of technology in education. Consequently, educators must focus on both pedagogy and technology to enhance the online learning experience.

In the course of research, it is recommended to thoroughly review existing literature, as it accelerates the acquisition of insights and diverse perspectives. Significant research on students' perceptions of distance education (DE) often involves those enrolled in online courses (Dobbs, del Carmen, & Waid-Lindberg, 2017; Hannay & Newvine, 2006). Some studies compare DE perceptions between traditional and online students, covering topics relevant to both undergraduate and adult learners (Horspool & Lange, 2012; Seok, DaCosta, Kinsell, & Tung, 2010). This comprehensive examination highlights the importance of diverse perspectives in assessing DE's effectiveness.

Hopker, Atherfold, Bartlett, et al. (2021) explore technology's role in boosting teacher confidence in teaching 16–19-year-old GCSE math re-sit learners across different environments. Their study provides empirical evidence on the impact of technology on pedagogy, offering practical insights for educators and policymakers in enhancing fluency among re-sit learners.

Sari and Nayir (2020) examine the challenges of distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic from teachers' perspectives, revealing the complexities of adapting to virtual learning, including technological and socio-emotional challenges. Their research emphasizes the importance of understanding teachers' experiences to develop effective remote teaching strategies.

Ukrainian studies by Sydorenko and Sydorenko (2022) underscore the critical role of teachers' proficiency with online platforms in successful distance learning. Their research stresses the need for systematic teacher training in digital tools to ensure effective DE.

Aim and tasks. Primarily, this study is aimed to find out the teachers' attitude towards distance education, and secondly to highlight the common and different features of the attitudes of tertiary teachers towards online education at two leading higher educational establishments in Transcarpathia. The main tasks were to define how tertiary teachers perceived and engaged with distance learning methodologies; what factors contributed to the formation of the attitudes to distance learning among the teachers in higher education; whether there were any statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward learning before and after remote teaching became an important part of our lives, and how it influenced teachers.

Research methods. The survey encompassed a diverse range of teachers in terms of age, gender, subject area and institutional affiliation, providing a comprehensive view of attitudes towards online education. The participants of this research were teachers from the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education and Uzhhorod National University. Table 1 summarizes the demographic data of the research participants.

It is evident that the teachers who participated in the survey represent a diverse range of academic disciplines and professional expertise. These disciplines include Biology, English language and literature, German language and literature, History, Hungarian language and literature, International Economics, Linguistics, Pedagogy, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociolinguistics, Sociology, Stylistics, and Ukrainian language and literature.

The questionnaire that we have developed for our research was administered online using the free Google Forms. Teachers were invited to take part in the survey during the 2023/2024 academic year and gave their answers anonymously. Completion of the research tool lasted up to 15 minutes.

To promote inclusivity and reduce language barriers, a bilingual questionnaire was carefully designed, with questions provided in both Hungarian and Ukrainian. This considerate method aimed to address the linguistic

Table 1

Research Participants' Demographic Data

| Gender	Number of respondents	%
Female	18	75
Male	6	25
Age	**Number of respondents**	**%**
25-35	3	12.5
36-45	12	50
Over 45 years	9	37.5
Institution	**Number of respondents**	**%**
Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education	19	79.2
Uzhhorod National University	5	20.8
TOTAL	24	100

preferences and needs of respondents, ensuring clear communication and fostering meaningful participation in the survey.

This research utilized both quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine teachers' attitudes toward online education. Quantitative methods allowed for the systematic examination of numerical data, identifying patterns and correlations, while qualitative methods explored detailed narratives and themes. The integration of these approaches provided a comprehensive understanding of the subject, offering valuable insights for future educational practices and policies.

Research results and their discussion. Platform preferences and effective strategies. Most teachers felt adequately prepared for online teaching but had concerns about academic integrity, mental health, and digital assessment. Despite these challenges, many saw online education as flexible and accessible. Most teachers preferred established platforms like Google Classroom, Meet, and Zoom. Effective strategies included frequent feedback, interactive activities, and personalized approaches. Teachers emphasized emotional, technical, and motivational support for students.

Workload and burnout. Many teachers struggled to manage their workload and avoid burnout. Limitations included lack of hands-on activities, technical issues, and difficulty maintaining engagement. While some teachers saw online education as a supplement, most believed traditional education was irreplaceable.

Age-related differences in online teaching attitudes. An interesting tendency could be observed and was proved by our data. It concerned the initial attitude of teachers to online teaching. The older teachers surveyed were more apprehensive about it compared to younger teachers. This finding aligns with previous research by Husti, Baran, Lekhner, Fabiian (2022). This trend was evident in the responses from teachers aged 35–45 and over 45. In contrast,
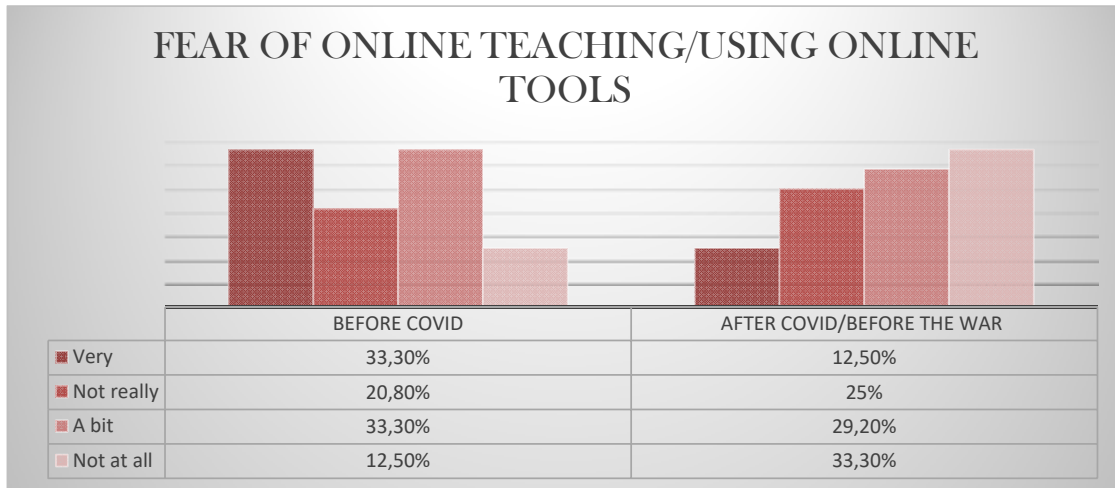
Fig. 1. Difference between tertiary teachers' concern about distance teaching pre-COVID and pre-war in the country (source: Cékusz, 2024)

the three youngest teachers (aged 25–35) reported positive experiences with online education and were not afraid of the transition brought about by the pandemic and the war (see Figure 1). It shows that the proportion of those who were afraid of distance education and those who were not was reversed.

Motivating students and setting shared goals. Teachers understood the importance of motivating students and setting shared goals to guide their learning. Strategies like emphasizing the common objective, recognizing class participation, and offering emotional support helped create a positive learning atmosphere and increase student involvement.

Long-term impact of online learning. When asked about the long-term impact of online learning, teachers had varied opinions. Some saw potential benefits like better digital skills and more flexibility, while others worried about weaker personal relationships and negative effects on communication and social skills, as well as lack of student interaction. This finding of ours totally supports the results Ulla and Perales (2021) obtained in their research.

Overall, teachers' experiences with online education were mixed. While they appreciated its flexibility and accessibility, they also highlighted challenges in maintaining engagement, ensuring academic integrity, and addressing mental health concerns.

Conclusions. Many tertiary teachers view distance learning as a mixed phenomenon. While they appreciate its flexibility and accessibility, some worry about its effectiveness for meaningful learning. The key factors that influence their opinions and attitudes include their previous experiences with online education, their beliefs about technology's role in education, cultural factors, institutional policies, and external factors like the pandemic and war.

Through a comprehensive examination of teacher attitudes, this study has important pedagogical implications for the future in that, based on the findings, it can provide valuable insights that can inform educational policies, instructional strategies, and technology interventions,

ultimately promoting more effective and inclusive learning environments in the contemporary educational environment.

Teachers need to adapt to the new reality and reassess their teaching methods, experiment with new strategies, and seek professional development to excel in online teaching.

While the research does not present ground-breaking new theories, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge in several ways:

1. The study specifically focuses on the attitudes and experiences of tertiary teachers towards distance education. This perspective is valuable as it complements existing research that often centres on student perspectives.

2. The research compares the attitudes of teachers from two different higher educational institutions in Transcarpathia, providing insights into potential variations in perceptions based on institutional context.

3. The study analyses changes in teacher attitudes towards distance education before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, offering valuable insights into the impact of the pandemic on educational practices.

Overall, the research provides valuable insights into the current state of distance education, highlighting both its benefits and challenges from the perspective of tertiary teachers. It contributes to the ongoing discussion on the future of education and the role of technology in shaping teaching and learning practices.

However, further research is needed to explore the long-term implications of online learning and to develop effective strategies for addressing these challenges.

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СТАВЛЕННЯ ВИКЛАДАЧІВ ЗАКЛАДІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ ЗАКАРПАТТЯ ДО ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

Дослідження вивчає ставлення викладачів закладів вищої освіти до дистанційного навчання у двох провідних закладах вищої освіти Закарпаття, зосереджуючись на зміні, спричинені розвитком онлайн-навчання, особливо під час пандемії COVID-19. Дослідження має на меті визначити спільні риси та відмінності у сприйнятті викладачів та дослідити фактори, які формують ці ставлення. Використовуючи як кількісні, так і якісні методи, дослідження систематично аналізує демографічні дані викладачів, їх досвід та сприйняття, пропонуючи комплексне розуміння того, як вони взаємодіють та адаптуються до онлайн-навчання.

Дослідження залучило різноманітну групу викладачів різних дисциплін, які взяли участь в онлайн-опитуванні, проведеному протягом 2023–2024 навчального року. Опитування було розроблено двома мовами – українською та угорською – для забезпечення інклюзивності та ефективної комунікації між респондентами та дослідниками. Кількісний аналіз виявив закономірності та кореляції, тоді як якісний аналіз надав більш глибоке розуміння нюансів досвіду та викликів, з якими стикалися викладачі під час онлайн-навчання.

Результати дослідження показують, що хоча більшість викладачів відчували себе підготовленими до онлайн-навчання, поширеними були занепокоєння щодо академічної доброчесності, психічного здоров'я та цифрового оцінювання. Незважаючи на ці виклики, викладачі визнали гнучкість та доступність онлайн-навчання, але висловили перевагу традиційним методам навчання. Значною тенденцією, що спостерігалася, було те, що молодші викладачі були більш сприйнятливі до онлайн-навчання порівняно зі старшими колегами, які були більш стурбовані переходом на онлайн-платформу.

Дослідження робить висновок, що хоча дистанційне навчання пропонує значні переваги (наприклад, гнучкість, доступність, різноманітність цифрових інструментів тощо), воно також представляє виклики (наприклад, технічні проблеми, відсутність соціальної взаємодії, перевантаження та вигорання тощо), які необхідно вирішувати для підвищення його ефективності. Результати цього дослідження можуть допомогти сформувати освітню політику та стратегії для створення більш ефективних та інклюзивних навчальних середовищ у мінливому світі освіти.

Ключові слова: *виклики, дистанційне навчання, психічне здоров'я, мотивація студентів, онлайн-навчання, пандемія, залучення студентів, ставлення викладачів, підтримка викладачів, Закарпаття.*